



Bernard C. "Jack" Young
Mayor

COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION

Tom Liebel, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Chris Ryer
Director

October 13, 2020

REQUEST: Concept Review – Construct Five-Story Apartment Building

ADDRESS: 221 W. Franklin Street

RECOMMENDATION: Concept Approval for Height, Massing, and Scale. Return to Commission with Final Details.

STAFF: Stacy Montgomery

APPLICANT: Urban Design Group (Architect)

OWNERS: HeLa Franklin LLC

SITE/HISTORIC DISTRICT

Howard Street Commercial Historic Districts:

Situated within the historic retail core of Baltimore City, the Howard Street Commercial historic district demonstrates distinctive characteristics of modestly scaled 19th and early 20th century commercial architecture. The buildings in the district represented smaller, specialized retailers in buildings that transitioned from primarily residential to commercial use at the turn of the 20th century.

Site Conditions/Architectural Description:

The site is located at the southeast corner of North Howard and West Franklin Street. The site is now an empty lot, as the buildings on the site were demolished in July 2020 due to their hazardous conditions. The buildings south of the site along North Howard are three to four stories. The building immediately to the south on Howard Street is a very tall one-story Moderne-style building, with the top of its cornice aligning with the top of the 2nd story of the neighboring properties (*Image 1*). There is a five-story building (St. James Place) across North Howard Street (*Image 2*). On the north side of West Franklin Street (outside the district) is a new six-story building and the historic Congress Hotel/Hotel Kernan (a Baltimore City Landmark) that is eight stories (*Image 3*). A new five-story building was approved by the Commission for the corner of Park Avenue and West Mulberry Street.

BACKGROUND

- Baltimore City Purchased this property in 1998.
- The Baltimore Development Corporation (BDC) issued an RFP that included this building in 2015.

- In 2016, BDC entered into a Land Disposition Agreement for this property and the properties at 217-225 West Franklin Street and 423 N Howard Street.
- At the August 8, 2017, CHAP hearing, the Commission determined that the properties at 423 North Howard Street and 223-225 West Franklin Street were significant and contributing to the historic district. The Commission also determined that the properties at 217-219 and 221 West Franklin Street had lost their historic significance and no longer contributed to the district and therefore could be demolished.
- At the September 12, 2017, CHAP hearing, the Commission determined that the applicant presented a case for an economic hardship and approved the demolition of the buildings at 423 North Howard Street and 223-225 West Franklin Street.
- At the October 10, 2017, CHAP hearing, the Commission granted concept approval for height, scale and massing of a new five-story apartment building on the lots where the buildings at 217-225 West Franklin Street and 423 North Howard Street stand that would incorporate the historic building at 425 North Howard Street.
- At the January 9, 2018, CHAP Hearing, the Commission reviewed the final design for the five-story apartment building and approved it with conditions.
- In the spring/summer of 2018, the makeup of the development team changed, and a new architect took over the project and the plans were altered.
- In October of 2018, the Commission approved a new four-story design for the new construction that would incorporate the historic building at 425 North Howard Street.
- In January of 2019, the development team met with CHAP staff to discuss the final design of the new construction that was to surround the historic building at 425 North Howard Street.
- The property was sold to the current owners in 2019.
- In June of 2020, the development team contacted the CHAP Executive Director and staff to alert them to the condition of the building and their determination that they could not retain the historic building at 425 North Howard Street.
- At the July 14, 2020 CHAP Hearing, the Commission reviewed a Demolition Hearing I (Determination of Architectural Significance) application for 425 North Howard Street and determined that the building still contributed to the historic district.
- On July 23, 2020, Eric Uttenreither, Assistant Commissioner for the Department of Housing and Community Development notified Eric Holcomb that he had posted an emergency demolition notice on the property at 425 North Howard Street after inspecting it and determining that it posed an immediate threat to the public's safety. The building was demolished along with the others already approved for demolition.

PROPOSAL & APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES

The applicant proposes to construct a five-story (60 foot tall) apartment building that covers the entire lot from Tyson Street to Howard Street and runs along West Franklin Street. The applicant is seeking approval for the proposed height, massing and scale.

Staff applied *Chapter 2 of the Design Guidelines for Additions, New Construction, and Non-Contributing Buildings*, specifically *2.1 Guiding Principles for New Design* and *2.2 Site Design*.

ANALYSIS

The proposed new construction meets *Chapter 2 of the Design Guidelines for Additions, New Construction, and Non-Contributing Buildings*, which states:

- The design of new buildings in historic districts should be consistent with the site design, scale, form, features, and detailing established by surrounding structures. In addition, new buildings should contribute to the pedestrian-oriented character of the neighborhood.

The district has a variety of building heights, from a very tall one-story building to a six-story building that was approved at the south end of the district. This building would be one of the taller buildings, but not the tallest. The building will fill the lot, like the other buildings in the district.

The proposal also meets *Design Guideline 2.1 Guiding Principles for New Design*, which states:

- Identify the character-defining features of the surrounding historic buildings and streetscape. Design new buildings to visually relate to the historic environment. Respect the established design precedent in the immediate area.
- New buildings that are similar to existing buildings in materials, form, massing and architectural features are accepted as long as the new buildings can be distinguished from the historic buildings.

The proposed new construction would be 60 feet tall, which is about 10 feet shorter than the building across the street, St. James Place. Buildings in the area vary in height from 20 feet at 421 North Howard Street to 70 feet at 424 North Howard Street. Since buildings in the area were constructed at different times, there is not a consistent height within the district. The variety in height is the pattern within the district, and taller buildings at the end of the block are also typical.

The proposed new construction meets *Design Guideline 2.2 Site Design*, which states:

- Retain established property line patterns, street and alley widths, setbacks, primary and secondary building orientation, and landscape elements.

The proposed new construction will fill the lot entirely, from the sidewalk at Howard Street to the rear alley along Tyson Street. This is consistent with the neighboring buildings along North Howard Street in the district.

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMENTS


There is no neighborhood Architectural Review Committee in this area. Notice has been sent to the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, Mount Vernon Belvedere Association, and the Market Center Merchants Association. To date, CHAP staff has not received any comments on this project.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends concept approval of the height, massing and scale (of the proposed height) as the design meets *Chapter 2 of the Design Guidelines for Additions, New Construction, and Non-Contributing Buildings*, specifically *2.1 Guiding Principles for New Design* and *2.2 Site Design*. The final design details are to be brought to the Commission for review and approval.

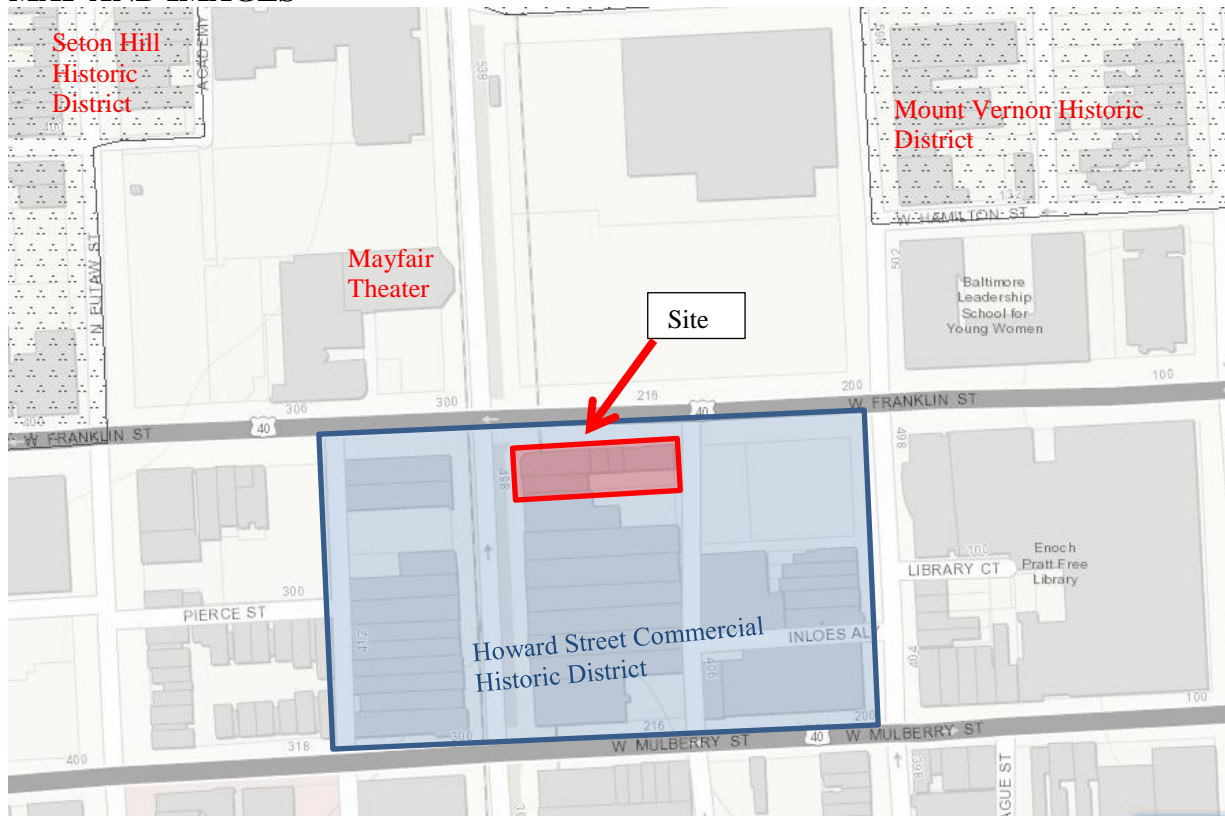
Staff further recommends that the design team pay special attention to the following in the final design:

- 1) The transition from the building at 421 North Howard Street to the new construction. Consider changes in building material or design at this meeting point. Also give special consideration to the treatment of the south wall that will rise above 421 North Howard Street.
- 2) The fenestration patterns of surrounding buildings.
- 3) Ensure that the building has a defined base, middle and top.
- 4) Since this is a corner building at an intersection of two major streets, design the building to address both North Howard Street and West Franklin Street. Investigate the use of a cut corner or corner entry similar to the historic building that was on this site.
- 5) Design the principal facades on both North Howard and Franklin Streets to create shadows and have depths similar to the surrounding historic buildings.



Eric Holcomb
Director

MAP AND IMAGES



Map 1: Site Map



Image 1: Intersection of Howard and Franklin Streets, facing east; showing the development site.



Image 2: 400 Block of North Howard Street, facing south; the five-story St. James Place is on the right.



Image 3: West Franklin Street facing west; St. James Place is on the left and the Congress Hotel, a Baltimore City Landmark, is on the right.